



# A Change in Rules

## A New Planning Rule

Forest plan revision on the Clearwater and Nez Perce Forests is changing.

On January 5, 2005, the USDA Forest Service published a new method for developing forest plans.

The “2005 planning rule” supersedes direction published in 1982. It has four primary purposes:

- (1) Streamline and improve the planning process by making plans more adaptable to changes in social, economic and environmental conditions;
- (2) Strengthen the role of science in planning;
- (3) Strengthen collaborative relationships; and
- (4) Reaffirm the principle of sustainable management.

In anticipation of possible changes in planning regulations, the Clearwater-Nez Perce forest plan revision team had produced information and documents that could be used under either system.

After careful consideration of many factors, including discussions with many of you, Regional Forester Abigail Kimbell, Clearwater Forest Supervisor Larry Dawson and Nez Perce Forest Supervisor Jane Cottrell have decided the Clearwater-Nez Perce planning zone should proceed using the updated direction.

“The 2005 planning rule represents the agency’s future. It will result in flexible, sustainable plans,” they explained.



## What Does It Mean?

### Strategic Forest Plans

Forest plans will provide general direction rather than specific direction for projects. Desired future conditions will be emphasized.

Key forest plan decisions include the allocation of suitable uses and the determination of desired conditions, management objectives, guidelines and monitoring regimes.

### A New Type of Forest Plan

Forest plans will consist of a vision, strategy and design criteria.

**The vision** provides management direction and explains the roles and contributions of national forest lands. It describes the desired conditions of the land, disturbance processes (e.g., fire, floods, insects-and-disease, etc.), the benefits and experiences the land can supply and monitoring measures.

**The strategy** describes how the forests intend to achieve desired conditions. It includes a discussion of suitable uses and key objectives for the various uses and activities. Special area designations (e.g. wilderness, wild and scenic rivers, etc.) are included in this section. It also defines monitoring measures related to implementation.

**The design criteria** provide the technical and scientific specifications that must be met to create an acceptable project. They include standards and references to additional applicable guidance.

## **What Does It Mean? (continued)**

### **A Comprehensive Evaluation Report**

Since forest plans developed in accordance with the 2005 planning rule will generally be strategic without on-the-ground effects, environmental impact statements are not required.

Instead, supporting documents and analysis will be assembled into a *comprehensive evaluation report*.

If it is determined that resulting actions will not result in significant impacts, a categorical exclusion will disclose the decision.

Under the 1982 rule a more detailed record of decision was required to disclose environmental impacts.

### **Environmental Management System**

The 2005 planning rule requires an element that is new to the Forest Service: the development of an environmental management system.

In a nutshell, the environmental management system is an ongoing process designed to: (1) identify environmental goals and objectives; (2) implement management actions; (3) monitor and evaluate results; and (4) adjust management practices.

The expected outcome is a continual improvement in the environment.

### **Continued Emphasis on Collaboration**

The Forest Service expects more people will be continuously involved in forest plan revisions using the 2005 rule because the process will be simpler, more transparent and faster.

The new direction requires the forests to work with people through all phases of forest plan revision, monitoring and the environmental management system.

In addition to participating in ongoing discussions, individuals will have an opportunity to comment during a 90-day

comment period that will occur with the release of a proposed plan.

### **A Formal Protest Period**

Traditionally the issuance of a forest planning decision was followed by a 90-day appeal period.

Under the new rules, a 30-day pre-decisional review and objection period replaces the appeals process.

Objections will be considered by a reviewing officer who will render a written response prior to the release of a final decision. That response will represent the agency's final decision.

The revised plan can be implemented 30 days after public notification of approval.

### **Emphasis on Sustainability**

The Multiple-Use Sustained Yield Act of 1960 requires national forest lands to be managed in a manner that provides a continuous flow of goods and services to the nation.

Consequently, forest plans will focus on providing a sustainable framework that guides on-the-ground management of projects. It will be based on social, economic and ecological systems.

### **A Revised Timeline**

If the Clearwater and Nez Perce National Forests revise according to the new rule, the timeline will look different.

Date	Event
11/1/05	Release proposed forest plans
	90-day comment period
10/1/06	Release forest plans
	30-day protest period

Final decisions will be issued at the conclusion of the protest period after all protests are resolved.

For information visit the forest plan revision website ([www.fs.fed.us/cnpz](http://www.fs.fed.us/cnpz)).